

# MYSTERY AEROPLANES OF THE 1930s Part IV

*John A. Keel*

IN the first three parts of this article we followed, in some detail, the 1933-34 "Ghostflier" news items that were unearthed with the help of Swedish researcher Åke Franzén and others. Let us close with a discussion around those facts, and a few additional items that have come to light.

## Geographical Distribution

One of Dr. Jacques Vallée's many important contributions to ufology is his discovery that the phenomenon tends to concentrate itself in thinly populated areas.<sup>1</sup> Although there were a number of mass sightings in southern Sweden, the most heavily populated section of the country, the greatest percentage of reports came from the sparsely populated lake country and the mountainous regions of the north where the average population density is three persons per square mile.<sup>2</sup> Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten were most often named in the reports. The Norwegian reports were mainly concentrated in Troms and Nordland, while the Finnish accounts (and we have only unearthed a few) were centred in the states of Oulu and Lappi.

AREA OR STATE PROVIDING THE MOST REPORTS	AREA IN SQ. KM.	POPULATION (1958 figures)	POP. PER SQ. KM.
<b>SWEDEN:</b>			
Jämtland	51,549	142,022	3
Västerbotten	59,140	240,403	4
Norrbotten	105,877	259,694	3
<b>NORWAY:</b>			
Oppland	25,325	165,451	6.6
Nordland	38,324	235,844	6.1
Troms	26,090	125,192	4
<b>FINLAND:</b>			
Oulu	56,686	402,800	7.1
Lapland (Lappi)	93,870	197,600	2.1

We can assume that communications were fragile in some of these areas in 1934, and that a great many sightings went unreported. But we do have enough detailed reports to trace the routes pursued by the planes, and have been able to lay out some flights from point to point on specific days. However, on some of the flap dates ghostfliers appeared simultaneously over many points in the south as well as the north, indicating that either many planes were in the air at that time or that the whole of Scandinavia was witnessing some rare form of atmospheric phenomenon.

Many of the reports *do* describe nothing but lights-in-the-sky (LITS). During that period every LITS was

obviously regarded as the ghostflier. This does not explain, of course, the many low altitude, grey, unmarked aeroplanes accompanied by engine sounds. As we have already stated, the deployment of these planes and their deliberate manoeuvres seems to suggest that they were designed to provide a frame of reference—or explanation—for the more mysterious wavering searchlights and multi-coloured high altitude lights.

If we disregard the LITS altogether and concentrate on the movements of the definite aircraft, we find that their flights seemed to originate above the Arctic Circle somewhere north of Norway, perhaps in the vicinity of Spitzbergen. Reports would be understandably scanty from the northernmost state of Finnmark (population density 1.4 persons per square kilometre). As they moved down the coast of Norway towards the more densely populated areas the reports would increase . . . and they did. There were some reports as far south as Trondheim. But in most flaps the craft turned inland around Tromsø, Norway, crossed into Sweden and moved to Gällivare . . . which is in the centre of Norrbotten. Gällivare appears to have served as a key landmark to the ghostfliers. From here some flights proceeded south-east to Luleå, Haparanda (and Kemi, Finland). Then they moved on down the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia to Skellefteå, Umeå, Sundsvall, and Uppsala, just north of Stockholm. Other flights pursued inland courses from Gällivare to Sorsele and Östersund.

If these were conventional planes operated by smugglers or by some foreign power, this was an enterprise of unprecedented boldness . . . and risk. The terrain was mountainous and dangerous. The ghostfliers chose to fly in the worst kind of weather so they had to be extraordinarily good navigators. They could rarely see the stars so they had to rely on instruments . . . and the known navigational instruments of the period were unreliable and primitive . . . at least for this kind of flying. Small wonder that the Scandinavian press commented with wonder on their navigational skills.

Assuming that they represented a foreign power, it is possible that they could have been launched from a ship in the Arctic Ocean, and could have flown the 300-400 miles to another ship in the Gulf of Bothnia. But why would they find it necessary to make such a hazardous trip daily for months on end? And why would they risk exposing their whole clandestine operation by clowning above the villages and towns along the way? What was the real purpose behind their seemingly insane missions?

The Finnish reports indicate that some flights returned to their mysterious home base by flying northwards over Lapland on a course that might have taken them to Novaya Zemlya, the islands where a mysterious

aircraft was photographed in 1931 (see Part Two of this series).

There are numerous other phantom aeroplane reports from the 1920's and 1930's emanating from other parts of the world, and this suggests that the Scandinavian-style operation could have been repeated in Europe and North America.

Ivan T. Sanderson recently attempted to tie together the various reports of phantom ships and submarines over the years to support a speculation that some form of super-civilisation exists under the seas.<sup>3</sup> Ray Palmer has for years advocated the concept that there is a hole in the North Pole and that some UFOs originate there. The 1934 Scandinavian wave can be used as new "proof" for any of these theories . . . and probably will be. It cannot, however, be easily accepted by those who believe in the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Those believers will undoubtedly dismiss the whole affair as the work of Germany or the Soviet Union even though anyone who is willing to spend an hour in a public library can learn that neither of those countries had the capability of launching and sustaining the Scandinavian overflights in 1933-34.

Only one basic fact can really be established from these reports: the ghostfliers originated to the North of the Arctic Circle and returned to that region.

#### Other Ghostfliers of the 1930s

In previous sections of this series we discussed typical phantom aeroplane reports from England and the United States. In his article *Over the Borderline*, published in *Unknown* magazine, September 1939, Fortean Eric Frank Russell cited many of the UFO events recorded in 1938. "In July 1938," he wrote, "an 'unknown aeroplane' flew over Croydon, London (*Daily Herald*), its noise fading eastward. Note that what passed over in the night was not necessarily an aeroplane, but definitely was a noise resembling that of a plane. Exactly one year earlier (*Daily Telegraph*) 'unknown planes' made strange mechanical noises in the darkness over Hendon, London."

Scandinavia was plagued by a long succession of UFO-type manifestations throughout the 1930s. Consider this item from the *Vastermanland Lans News*, October 10, 1936: "A strange light phenomenon has been observed over a meadowland in the area of Kanikebo near the community of Moklinta. Several times in recent weeks people have observed a reddish light, sometimes almost dazzling, on dark evenings between the hours of 8.00-9.00 p.m. The light rises slowly and increases little by little in size and strength until finally a clear glowing ball the size of a coffee-saucer is visible. Sometimes it dies out slowly, expiring completely only to rise again in nearby places. A scientist will investigate the area by aeroplane."

A month later the same newspaper carried this follow-up report: "November 10, 1936. Vasteras. No cause has been found for the mysterious 'light bodies' in Moklinta. Some of the residents are convinced the phenomenon is caused by the bones buried in the immediate vicinity and said to be thousands of years old."

Norway also shared the flap of November 1936.

81.) November 21, 1936. Harstad, Norway. Reports of a

mysterious light have arrived from several different places. The Norwegian Telegraphic Agency correspondent learned of the sightings during an interview with the Sixth Division. An inquiry into the reports is being conducted by the county constabulary. The division has also received a message about mysterious lights seen Tuesday evening outside Tromsø. There is every reason to believe that the observations are real. During the last sighting in upper Norway many people received mysterious radio signals. Earlier speculations that these signals were a Russian military code are disputed.

#### Radio Signals

Mysterious radio signals had accompanied the 1933-34 ghostflier activity. The *Hudiksvalls News* reported on January 1, 1934:

"Radio listeners in Umeå have been receiving conversations on their loudspeakers containing information about the ghostfliers, indicating their intelligence service is modern. The conversations are on the wavelength of a gramophone programme in Umeå and discussed meeting at a special point."

These "pirate" radio broadcasts were heard by others in Norrbysskar, Hedesunda, Nordmaling and Halsingtuna that month on the 230-275 and 900 metre bands. In some cases the phantom broadcasters spoke in broken Swedish.

The haughty *New York Times* was already in the early 1930s rattling its sabre for war, particularly against Japan, and it repeatedly cited "rumours" which were never mentioned in the Scandinavian press. On November 20, 1934, the *New York Times* carried a dispatch datelined Helsingfors, Finland, claiming that the ghostflier had "revived rumours of Soviet naval armaments on the Arctic coast." It also commented on the "equally deep mystery surrounding wireless signals, supposedly of a military nature, in the Arctic." These signals were "solved by Finnish radio experts," the newspaper said. "They located the sending stations on the German Baltic coast near Koenigsberg. The signals are believed here to have been in connection with German experiments to perfect military aviation." Then this brief item was tagged onto the ghostflier story:

"Berlevaag, Finnmark, Norway, November 19 (AP). The mystery of 'ghost' airplanes and ships at sea deepened tonight when it was reported two warships, not Norwegian, were observed last night from the outermost islands in the Arctic Ocean to the north."

Time—and the historical record—vindicated both Germany and the Soviet Union as possible sources of the ghostflier phenomenon. Years earlier, in 1921, the *New York Times* fussed over the appearance of a "Bolshevist aeroplane" which circled Paris. "For some obscure reason" the French meteorological office issued a notice to the press stating that, "An aeroplane flying at a great height passed over Paris about 9.45 on March 5, making a semi-circular tour of the city from the southwest to the west-north-west side. As it went the plane left behind it a trail of smoke which at times resembled a ribbon and at other times a featherlike cloud." (Sounds like a contrail.) "A mystery is being made as to why meteorological experts should wish to know about this airplane, but they are apparently very anxious to learn its type and characteristics, its exact trajectory, its height and speed between 9.45 and 10 o'clock and, lastly,



the direction and speed of the wind at the altitude of the flight," the *Times* continued, March 19, 1921.

The German press rattled their swords on November 24, 1936, when the newspaper *Der Angriff* published a front-page story, complete with maps, claiming that the Soviet Union was building sixteen military airfields on the Kola Peninsula, far north of the Arctic Circle in a desolate, thinly populated wasteland with virtually no military value. The Germans warned that 300 military planes would be based there and might be used to invade Scandinavia. Where the Russians would get 300 planes in 1936 to base in that part of the world was not explained. Perhaps the Russians were also seeing ghostfliers and had become alarmed over the possibility that some foreign power was invading their territory from the north.

Early in 1937 our friendly ghostfliers were busy from northern Norway to Vienna, Austria. On Thursday, February 11, 1937, the crew of the fishing boat *Fram* started out from Kvalsik, Norway, at 9.00 p.m. Just outside of Kvalsik there is a cape with high hills separating it from the mainland. As the *Fram* circled this cape, they discovered a large aeroplane resting on the water. Thinking the plane was in trouble, the captain changed his course and headed for it. Red and green lights were glowing on the machine, but as the boat approached, the lights were suddenly extinguished. Then the plane was quickly enveloped in a cloud of smoke, and it vanished!

At noon the next day, according to the *Berliner Borzen Zeitung* and the *National Zeitung*, a mysterious aeroplane circled over Vienna, Austria, at high altitude, exciting speculations that it was of Czechoslovakian or Russian origin. A few days later, the phantom pilot revisited the fort at Boden, Sweden. It returned still again that April. In May, a government hearing on the status of the ghostflier was held in Umeå, Sweden. A representative named Lindbergs demanded that a new investigation should be held. But the Minister of Defence pointed out that extensive investigations had already been held, that special searchlights and listening apparatus had been mounted in the sighting areas, and that all the results had been negative. (It all sounded depressingly familiar.)

In September 1937, "unfamiliar aeroplanes" repeatedly buzzed the Swedish naval installation at Karlskrona. The minister of Defence explained at an inquiry that he had no answer to the mystery but could only confirm that "a foreign machine had flown over the restricted military area." As usual, the plane carried no insignia or identifying marks. On October 24, 1937, the six-man crew of an unnamed fishing boat near Mylingslykten outside of Hammerfest, Norway reported seeing a very large aeroplane resting on the water. As they neared it, it suddenly turned on bright lights and took off, passing so close to their vessel that they feared a crash.

#### Aftermath

In February 1969, Mr. Åke Franzen, the Stockholm researcher who uncovered and translated many of the reports used in this study, telephoned Dr. Tage O. Eriksson of the Research Institute for National Defence (named on page 554 of the Condon Report) to discuss

the 1934 wave. Dr. Eriksson cordially invited Mr. Franzen to drop by his office.

"The conversation was not as fruitful as I expected," Mr. Franzen reported. "He said that all the articles in the newspapers at the time [1934] were only imagination and mass hysteria. Dr. Eriksson's own explanation of the phenomenon was hot air balloons!"

"I told him about Major Porat and General Virgin [two of the officials named in the '34 accounts] and he said the newspapers had distorted their statements.

"I asked him if there exists any official files on these 1934 reports and he denied it.

"He agreed with Dr. Condon and his report on UFOs and said he had met two of the Condon committee in the U.S.A. last summer and that they were very reliable people."

I regret that I must disagree with Dr. Eriksson. I believe that the 1930s reports form an important body of evidence in the UFO puzzle, and that the ghostfliers' grey, unmarked aeroplanes were "hard" objects of a most extraordinary nature. I have spent many long, tiresome hours in the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library trying to uncover historical evidence to support the obvious answer . . . that the planes were of mundane origin. Such evidence does not seem to exist.

In recent months there have been new UFO waves in the same areas of Scandinavia, and new reports of phantom ships and submarines off the coasts of Norway and Sweden.<sup>4</sup> Apparently whoever visited the Arctic Circle so mysteriously forty years ago *is still there*. Perhaps Ivan T. Sanderson is correct when he suggests that the navies of the world have been far more involved in UFO research than our Air Forces. It is well-known that the U.S. Office of Naval Research has been interested in UFOs for years and maintains huge, expensive and mysterious installations in the Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

In these articles I have been obliged to summarise a good deal and have presented only a few of the many reports on hand. It has been necessary to skip over much material, such as the fact that approximately 25% of the known ghostflier sightings occurred at 6.00 p.m. Nor could I waste space on the obvious fireball and meteor reports that turned up in our material. It is quite possible that more thorough investigations in Scandinavia will reveal new reports which will clarify the whole situation . . . although I doubt it. It would help if willing researchers would scour the newspapers in their own areas for this period and send their findings to FSR. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the ghostfliers had been everywhere at once.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See *Analysis of 8,260 UFO Sightings* by Dr. Jacques Vallée, FSR May/June 1968. Dr. Vallée states, ". . . the number of reported UFO sightings per million people in American states rises very rapidly when population density decreases".

<sup>2</sup> See *Reports From Sweden* by Åke Jonsson, FSR March/April 1968, for details of the 1967 UFO wave in these same areas of Sweden. Several of the communities named by Mr. Jonsson, such as Vilhelmina, Storsele, and Sala also produced reports during the 1934 wave. Closer examination might demonstrate that the 1967 objects followed essentially the same "routes" as the 1934 ghostfliers. The

(Continued on Page 28)

# THE SAAPUNKI UFO

## Results of investigations

### *Ahti Karavieri*

In an article in the March/April 1971 issue of *FSR*, Elis Grahn gave us his translation of newspaper reports about a glowing object near the ground which left behind it a circle of green ice in the snow. Now he has translated the report made by our contributor who is Chairman of the Northern Finland UFO Investigation Association (formerly the Oulu UFO group) after intensive investigations. It includes much additional information about the Saapunki case to that given in the newspaper accounts, so it is presented here in full.

ON the morning of January 3, 1971, a UFO was seen in the village of Saapunki in Kuusamo, leaving behind melted snow with particles in it, samples of which were taken for investigation very soon after the incident.\*

On the Sunday morning, January 3, between 5.58 and 6.15 a.m., a bright light phenomenon was seen in the village of Saapunki in Kuusamo. The first eye-witnesses noticed the phenomenon, at about 6.00 a.m., above Pitkäperä of Lake Saapunki. One witness said the time was "a couple of minutes to six," while another said it was "almost at six o'clock sharp."

The phenomenon was seen as a bright ball of light moving slowly along the length of the lake in a westerly direction. The ball of light moved at a level of only about 8 metres from the ice, and it could be seen against the trees on the slope of the opposite bank. The first observations were made in the eastern part of the lake at about 6.00 a.m., and the phenomenon is then said to have moved at about walking speed, the watchers being at the side of the lake at a distance of 300 metres to 1 kilometre. In spite of what was almost a 7 beaufort storm from the south-west, the phenomenon moved with a steady speed, slanting against the wind, keeping the same altitude.

The eye-witnesses state that the light from the phenomenon was strong enough to illuminate the slopes of the nearby hills so that trees and buildings were clearly seen in detail, even on a slope  $1\frac{1}{2}$  km. away. The area was otherwise quite dark at the time and in the storm so much snow was falling that the lights of houses 300 metres away were not visible.

The first observers were not able to tell the exact size of the ball of light since it was impossible to look straight at it because of its great intensity. There was no sound to be heard, but the snowstorm was so forceful it blotted out all weak sounds. One of the first observations in connection with the phenomenon was the darkening of the electric lights as it was passing. One of the observers, J.B., said the electric lights went dark just as he was watching the strange light. Many people in the village got a look at the phenomenon at the very beginning as they had just awoken to do their morning tasks.

\* A British analysis of a sample of the water was conducted and the report published in *FSR* for July/August 1971.

In about 15 minutes the phenomenon moved from the Pitkäperä of Lake Saapunki to Tuhkaniemi at the middle of the lake, a distance of about 2.5 km. The house of Mr. Mauno and Mrs. Martta Talala at Tuhkaniemi was on the route of the phenomenon, and the ball of light stopped in the garden of the Talala house some 17-19 metres from their kitchen window. The Talala house stands in the middle of a few birch trees at the edge of some fields near the bank, about 8 metres from the water's edge and almost on a straight line with the path taken by the UFO. The side of the lake to the south-east has a height of about 60 metres and is about 2 km. away. The south and north sides of the lake rise to form hills; a hill 60 metres high rises in the north and is about 1.5 km. away. The lake is thus situated in this formation in an east-south-east direction which was also the direction taken by the UFO. The eye-witnesses were on different sides of the lake, so that observations were made simultaneously from many different directions. As the houses are built on the slopes, many of the observers looked at the phenomenon from higher positions.

The latter part of the happening took place just beside the house of the Talalas. The phenomenon arrived there at about 6.15 a.m. The Talalas were having their morning coffee in front of their kitchen window, when the phenomenon appeared right in front of the window, only 17 metres away, behind some berry bushes in the garden. There was nothing unusual in being up this early as the lady of the house had to do her morning tasks in the cowshed at this time. Mrs. Martta Talala was already fully dressed, but Mr. Mauno Talala was only half dressed, sitting and drinking his morning coffee, when surprised, they both pointed out the blinding light to each other as it appeared outside. A bit frightened, Mauno Talala hurried to get dressed in order to have a look at whatever that strange light might be.

It was quite impossible to look at the light. They could only give it quick side glances. Except for the white brightness they could see no colours. Mauno Talala estimates the size of the light to have been 10 metres in diameter, measured against the garden fence. Looking to the side, he was able to see a small island 300 metres away as clear as in broad daylight—the light was shining through the dense snowstorm. There was